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Open Letter to South Asian Research Institutes, Pen America, Asia Society, and Other Organizations who Support Freedom of Speech in South Asia

Recently, Pakistan and India engaged in a conflict that nearly escalated to a nuclear-armed war. This ongoing animosity between the two nations is nothing new and dates back to the time of partition in 1947. Supporters of partition falsely led the people to believe that Muslims and Hindus could not live together in one nation and that partition was the *only* solution. Meanwhile, the views of those leaders who vehemently spoke out against partition, including my grandfather Allama Mashriqi, were suppressed and distorted. As a result, the media, literature, and educational curriculum today reflect a one-sided, biased view of history that only serves to fuel hatred amongst Muslims, Hindus, and people of other faiths and fosters terrorism in the region. I believe that in order to bring peace to the region and greater stability around the world, we *must* correct the historical record and let the public learn from the views of those who opposed partition.

Before I proceed further, let me take a moment to introduce myself. I am an independent researcher based in the United States of America. My grandfather, Allama Mashriqi, was a famous Cambridge University graduate and leading politician during the Indian subcontinent's (now comprised of India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan) freedom movement. Growing up in a political family, Allama Mashriqi, M.A. Jinnah (Founder of Pakistan), M.K Gandhi, and other leaders were frequently discussed. I was fortunate to learn about the freedom movement from those who were directly involved in it, namely my family members and the Khaksars (Mashriqi's followers). In particular, I learned how and why Mashriqi opposed the partition of India. Later, as an adult, I became a researcher and have spent over 20 years writing on Mashriqi and India's partition (along with other topics). I have published my findings – based on knowledge acquired from the sources mentioned above – in books, peer-reviewed academic journals, and in newspaper articles in different countries.

In short, Mashriqi opposed partition because he felt that Muslims and Hindus had lived together peacefully for centuries and that there was no reason that they couldn't do so in an independent and free India. Furthermore, he felt that dividing the country would produce devastating consequences for the region. Indeed, as you may already know, ***partition triggered sectarian violence and resulted in brutal and widespread massacres of over a million people, including the abduction and rape of countless females and indescribable devastation for many migrants.*** Pakistan and India, to this day, have yet to find a lasting peace; cross-border terrorism, wars, the Kashmir issue, water issue, and travel restrictions continue to persist, while families remain divided across borders. The threat of war and potential use of nuclear weapons also loom over the region.

Despite the severe consequences brought about by partition, Pakistan and India's history remains distorted and shockingly one-sided; there is a dearth of information on the strong opposition to partition. There are multiple reasons why Pakistan and India's history remains imbalanced. Prior to partition, the proponents of division falsely claimed that splitting the nation would benefit the people. When the British transferred power to the All-India Muslim League and the Indian National Congress in 1947, they in essence declared them victors. The supporters of these so-called victors have continued to present a one-sided and misleading version of the freedom movement and the partition of India ever since. Any criticism of the leaders who endorsed partition is deemed unacceptable and those who offer differing points of view are either harassed or labeled as traitors to Pakistan or India respectively.

Along with suppressing opposing points of view, Pakistan and India refuse to release or provide easy access to documents for those leaders who opposed partition. For example, a large number of documents related to Mashriqi (and his Khaksar Movement) were confiscated or classified, making it nearly impossible to access them. By silencing critics and cutting off access to critical portions of both nations' history, the two countries have crushed free speech. Sadly, Pakistan and India (and the West) thus continue to teach an imbalanced history. In order to avoid bias and help students think critically and learn both sides of the story, one solution is that educational institutions (including in the West) can invite outside scholars and others who can offer opposing points of view to that of the professor.

We will not realize lasting peace in the region until the history books are corrected and people have the opportunity to learn from those who fought against India's partition. Continued enmity in the region is not just a South Asian matter, but in fact has far-reaching consequences for individuals in both the East and West, regardless of faith – whether Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, Christian, Jewish, etc. Therefore, the onus is on everyone to bring awareness to the region's imbalanced history and to urge the declassification of confiscated documents. Institutions, in particular, can use social media and newsletters and organize symposiums and conferences to highlight those leaders who supported unity and opposed partition in the region. When the truth behind the false narrative of India's partition is revealed, the justification for the current animosity between the two nations will also fade away. This is the true key to lasting peace and harmony throughout the region and greater stability around the world.

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